

Hempstead High School



"We at Hempstead feel we have a say. Even those not on the leadership team have a say. We have much improved professional development."

Initial Implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model

A. About the District

The Dubuque Community School District includes eighteen schools (three high schools, three middle schools, and twelve elementary schools) and serves almost 10,000 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district is one of eight designated by the state as "urban."

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Hempstead High School serves approximately 1600 students in grades nine through twelve. Its students are predominantly white and middle class, although nearly 15 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. Ten percent of the students have IEPs but there are no sizable groups of ethnic minorities or English Language Learners.

Hempstead High School has a principal, four assistant principals and 110 teachers. The school is divided into four "neighborhoods" (small learning communities) but maintains a department structure that includes 15 departments.

Department of Education Site Visit

Department of Education staff visited Hempstead High School on March 10, 2004. The principal (David Olson), district staff development director (Nancy Bradley), AEA representatives (Barb Olson and Ruth Neagle) and school leadership team were interviewed as a group. The principal and individual teachers were interviewed during the day, and several classrooms observed.

"In the beginning it was "try a strategy." Now there are expectations. We should do at least three to five trials a month and observe other teachers at least twice a month."

On model itself: Before this model was implemented, we had a hodgepodge in PD – it wasn't practical, there was no continuity. Now both the consistency and commitment are different; when it's PD day, I know the topic, the expectations, I know it involves me and I'm part of the process. We'll get better student results if we can be consistent across the faculty."

B. Applying the Operating Principles

Focus on Instruction

Hempstead High School has focused on reading in the content areas. All departments are attempting to implement strategies learned in training, and this has resulted in an unusual coherence and focus for a large high school. The principal works constantly to maintain this focus on instruction and is supported by the district staff development director in this effort.

“Get the whole staff on board. Get everyone involved if you want student achievement. Just bite that bullet.”

Participative Decision Making

Several years ago, a new principal, David Olson, began restructuring Hempstead High School. At this point a complex series of decision-making groups make decisions at the school. Participation in PD decisions is relatively recent, according to many teachers interviewed, but the principle is well established. Currently, the Interdisciplinary Neighborhood Team, Site Council, Department Chairs, Data Coach Team, Learning Strategies Team, IPDM Team, Implementation Team and Administrative Team work on various aspects of the school’s PD program. With the exception of the Administrative Team, all groups include teacher representatives, and the distributed leadership is serving to give teachers a voice in governing professional development at the school.

Maintaining clear two-way communications among large secondary faculties is always a challenge. Hempstead’s leadership structure appears to facilitate shared language and understandings, at least with respect to professional development. Teacher interviews yielded consistent reports of PD decisions, activities, and challenges.



Simultaneity

Hempstead appears to be balancing many balls at the moment. This may be partly attributed to the fact that different groups are addressing the tasks presented by different parts of the Iowa Professional Development Model (e.g., data analysis, selection of content, design of training, implementation, etc.). The principal has a massive task in maintaining staff focus on the PD program selected to address student need while simultaneously attending to the concerns of fifteen departments. This principal also had multiple issues needing attention as he entered this school, e.g., discipline policies, schedules, student achievement issues. He feels he’s had to operate on multiple tracks in order to address pressing problems.

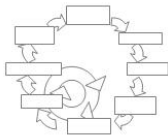
A challenge for Hempstead will be coordinating its own initiative with district initiatives. Districts can overwhelm individual school sites with ambitious improvement efforts in multiple areas without realizing the fragmenting impact.

Leadership

The principal is clearly the instructional leader at Hempstead High School. He participates in leadership team meetings and is knowledgeable about PD content and its implementation in his school. The principal is active in problem solving when obstacles arise; he was instrumental in redesigning learning opportunities and setting expectations for collaborative teams and implementation targets. He is also responsible for the elaborate structures in place for distributed leadership, actively participating with all teams to ensure their productive functioning. As one teacher commented about the principal, “David is an instructional leader. He gets into the instruction and works right with you on the strategies.”

Teachers report that their principal has urged them to model their personal PD agendas on the school’s agenda during the coming year, and he has tied evaluation criteria to the schools PD plan.

C. The Professional Development Cycle



As is true of all the schools and districts who participated in the initial orientation to the Iowa Professional Development Model during the 2003-04 academic year, Hempstead High School addressed some components of the PD cycle more thoroughly than others. When Hempstead agreed to be one of the pilot schools for the “Urban Eight” participating in the DE’s professional development seminar series, they had already committed to a PD agenda for the 2003-04 school year. Their decision was to focus on the ongoing cycle and address the issues raised by that part of the model.

Collecting and Analyzing Student Data

The Hempstead leadership team learned to do item analysis of their ITED data during the seminar series and also from training conducted by their district. Although their ITED data was fairly strong for a large high school, teachers were extremely suspicious of their data and considered it unreliable. They believed that administration procedures had not been standardized and that both teachers and students had not taken the testing seriously. The school is addressing this issue and hopes to have testing standardized for the fall 2004 administration of the ITED. At present, Hempstead is working more off perceptions of student need than data on student strengths and weaknesses.

A somewhat disturbing pattern in the school’s reading scores was a steady decline from ninth through eleventh grade – students read better as they enter high school than when they leave, if these data are accurate. This pattern was identified by the English department but does not appear to be a cause for concern across the faculty. Rather, there is a widespread feeling among faculty that reading comprehension is weak among their students.

Goal Setting

Although the school had low confidence in its test data, improvement targets were set for reading. The goal is to reduce the number of students with low proficiency in reading on the Iowa Test of Educational Development at the eleventh grade. The 01-03 biennium average places 75.66 percent of the eleventh graders at a proficient level. The goal is for that proficiency to approach 80% with the Fall 04 data figured into the biennium.

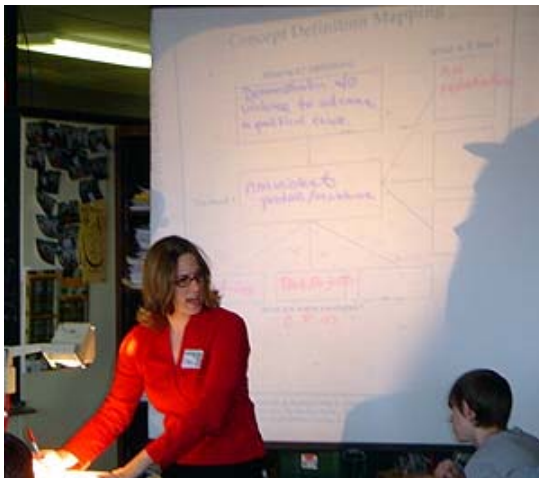
Selecting Content

As a school, Hempstead did not consult the research base on secondary reading before selecting their PD content. Their district had already contracted with an external consultant to provide training in content area reading, and Hempstead elected to participate in that training because it aligned with their focus. During the training, the external consultant provided an overview of research on the evidence supporting various reading strategies. Although participants remembered this event, none could explain the research base underlying their initiative.

Designing Process for Professional Development

Hempstead had the services of the district's external reading expert on three days for two hours each day – August 21 and September 17, 2003 and January 28, 2004. In addition, the school had department and learning team meetings on October 31 and February 13, as well as their regularly scheduled peer coaching meetings (begun in January) to work on content area reading strategies. The school could have benefited from more extensive learning opportunities but the ones they did have were front loaded in the beginning of the year, which increased their chances for an implementation.

Initial training in content area reading strategies resulted in a minor revolt at the high school. Many were dissatisfied with the content and the process and felt it was inappropriate for older students. Teachers and administrators conferred first with each other and then with their trainer to modify subsequent learning opportunities and teachers reported must greater satisfaction with



later training events. As a result of this early glitch, the faculty learned two very important lessons with respect to the design of professional development. First, PD efforts are not abandoned at the first sign of trouble; rather, problems are solved, and as this faculty discovered, most trainers are eager to meet the needs of their clients. Second, the faculty learned the importance prior to training of negotiating with trainers their needs and expectations.

Given the extremely limited training time available to staff, it is remarkable that as much learning took place as was evidenced by later classroom observations. The training provided rationale and theory

but had little time for demonstrations and no time for practice within the two-hour time blocks allotted. Teachers struggled to create their own demonstrations and opportunities for practice with the new strategies, but future training designs will no doubt insist on greater periods of time with the trainer.

On-Going Cycle

The on-going cycle of learning opportunities, collaborative team meetings, and the study of implementation occurred in various group meetings and in training sessions for the entire faculty. A system for collecting formative data was not yet in place, so analysis of student data was not a part of collaborative work during this initial trial of the IPDM. Most of the training was provided by an external consultant hired by the district although faculty provided additional assistance to each other.

The schedule for learning opportunities, as mentioned above, was three two-hour sessions held in August, September and January. Team meeting time was provided by the district on October 31 and February 13.

At the school site, peer coaching teams met weekly for approximately 30 minutes per week. Some of the teams used department meeting time to further their collaborative work.

All teachers attended the training in content area reading strategies.

Collaboration and Implementation

Working in collaborative teams for the specific purpose of implementing new teaching strategies was fairly new for this faculty. While they had extensive experience in working with many groups to conduct the business of the school, peer coaching teams attached to training was a new experience. A group of 24 teachers had already participated in a study team initiative so the school had the advantage of their experience. All teachers read an article on peer coaching and studied the materials on collaboration provided by the state-wide reading team.

Teams were formed by faculty members who simply chose their partners for collaboration. The structure provided to these teams was fairly loose; for example, try the new strategies and observe each other working with the new strategies. Some teachers reported the need for greater structure in their use of the time while other teams simply created their own structures to make the time more productive. For the 2004-05 school year, the leadership team will need to address this concern to ensure not only higher levels of use of the new strategies but better fidelity to the various strategies. If they can capture more time with their external consultant, she can help them plan and develop lessons in their teams during training times and model the behaviors most likely to result in productive team time. As the faculty solves the issues of collecting formative data, teams will also need a structure for analyzing these data and reporting it to the faculty at large.

There was no formal implementation plan developed by the leadership team, other than to encourage teachers to try the

“Our rockiest road and biggest breakthrough has been getting the peer coaching in place.”

“At first there was a lot of resistance to the peer coaching teams. Teachers didn’t want to work together, they functioned as free agents. Now the times are changing. We’re focused on teaching and learning, and lots of us welcome that time together.”

“People are pretty cheerful about peer coaching time – we just need more time to do it. Our team got tired of just sharing and now we get more from planning and thinking how to do lessons. Time for practical applications is important.”

new strategies and to record their use of the strategies. (See Part 4 for examples of planning forms, implementation logs and observation logs.) This practice endured for a couple of months, at which point the leadership team set minimum expectations for three to five uses of new strategies per month and two observations of colleagues per month.

"This is especially wonderful for new teachers. We have better communication with veteran teachers. It's a wonderful equalizer, everyone learns and everyone shares."

Two forms of data were collected to document implementation of the content area reading strategies: A weekly log, on which each teacher recorded use of reading strategies and an observation form on which teachers recorded the strategies they had observed and their plans for using similar strategies in their own classrooms. Data collected on these forms were compiled monthly and shared with the faculty. The departments reporting the highest use is English.

At the time of our site visit, no system was in place for looking objectively at the quality of content area reading strategies. The principal and leadership team will need to confer with their external reading consultant on ways to develop this part of their study of implementation.

Formative Data Collection

The principal and leadership team at Hempstead are in the process of locating and studying instruments that could be used periodically to study student comprehension of various kinds of text. At the time of our site visit, no decisions had been made about the choice of an instrument or instruments, the frequency of administration, who would be tested, etc. This is a large agenda item for the leadership team as they plan their PD program for 2004-05.



Summative Data

ITBS data will be used to evaluate program effectiveness. ITBS is administered in the fall in the Dubuque Community School District and the first evaluation will occur mid-year in the 2004-2005 academic year.

External Technical Assistance

Hempstead had concrete support from its district with data analysis and training. The school also had encouragement, interest and reinforcement from district level administrators, especially the staff development director, as they navigated the

changes necessary to implement the Iowa Professional Development Model. If the board of the Dubuque Community School District was knowledgeable and supportive of the school's PD efforts, teachers were unaware of it.

D. Observations About the Site Visit

Hempstead has been a hotbed of learning this year. They addressed and solved the issues presented by the operating principles and then waded into the midst of the professional development cycle, identifying many problems and solving some. It is a testament to the

determination of this faculty and principal that they are excited and cheerful about their progress and realistic about the tasks that remain before they can implement the full PD cycle. What is clear is that a large high school can use the IPDM to focus attention on instruction and target student learning needs. Many of the components of the PD model were completely foreign in the culture of this school and nevertheless were either implemented or seen as legitimate targets for implementation.

This site was strong in the operating principles—focus on instruction, participative decision making, simultaneity, and leadership. It has made promising first steps toward the design of training, the provision of learning opportunities, the establishing of collaborative teams and the study of implementation. Primary agendas in the coming year will be to increase training time for faculty, structure collaborative teams for maximum productivity, collect formative student learning data, and use their implementation data in conjunction with formative data to make appropriate adjustments to their program.



We largely agree with Hempstead's self-analysis of its own growth during its initial trial with the IPDM. The school reported modest growth in maintaining a focus on instruction and significant growth in studying implementation, providing learning opportunities for all faculty, and providing ongoing support for their PD initiative. Although respondents did not report significant growth in teacher collaboration, we felt, after numerous interviews, that the school had made substantial progress in this area as well.